

The International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies (**IFIMES**) from Ljubljana, Slovenia, has prepared an analysis of the current political situation in Macedonia which has recently recognised the independence of the Republic of Kosovo and rejected the latest ambassador Matthew Nimit's compromise proposal on the name "**Republic of Northern Macedonia**". The most relevant and interesting sections from the comprehensive analysis are given below.

WHERE IS MACEDONIA BOUND FOR?

AN INTERNATIONALLY ISOLATED STATE

The early parliamentary elections in Macedonia were held on 1 June 2008. In October we saw the first 100 days of the new government (the second one since the country's independence) led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (VMRO-DPMNE) with the new Albanian partner in the coalition, i.e. Democratic Union for Integration (DUI/BDI). Although the "honeymoon" of a new government usually lasts 100 days, Gruevski's government "honeeyears" have lasted since July 2006 when he won the election for the first time.

At the recent early parliamentary elections Macedonian opposition (the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia - SDSM) was totally defeated. SDSM even lost its president Radmila Šekerinska, former vice-president of the National Council for European Integration, although during her term of office Macedonia was granted the status of EU candidate country in December 2005. Thus, in the period of less than four years SDSM has replaced its second president.

In comparison with the recent past, i.e. the period prior to July 2006, Macedonia today seems to be internationally very isolated. After the unprincipled Greek veto on its NATO accession, it is likely that Macedonia this year, for the third time in a row, will not receive a positive report for the start of its EU accession talks, either. If Greece was responsible for its failed attempts to join NATO, Macedonia is definitely responsible for the unsuccessful EU accession process, since it has failed to meet the eight EU criteria plus another (ninth) one which it had set itself, i.e. the early elections, which turned out to be the worst organised and most violent parliamentary elections ever. The results are known.

NIKOLA GRUEVSKI'S LOOSER POLITICS

1

After June elections Gruevski chose the Democratic Union for Integration as the new coalition partner instead of the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA/PDSH) which had been his coalition partner during the first two years of his government. According to the election result, which many have questioned due to election irregularities, DUI won 18 deputy seats in the Parliament thus securing Gruevski an even stronger two-third position and power. During the first 100 days of his dominant government Gruevski adopted over 150 laws with the speed of light, supported by DUI who behaved in the Parliament as if they were competing in the "fast fingers" part of the popular "Who wants to be a millionaire?" quiz.

Several controversial laws were adopted through such expeditious procedure, such as the law on the use of Albanian language, the law on energy, the law on lobbying and the rules of procedure of the Parliament which were adopted in the absence of the opposition. The opposition parties boycotted the Parliament each for its own reasons: DPA did not recognise the election result while SDSM and its coalition partners opposed the apprehension of the popular mayor of the city of Strumica and the SDSM president-in-office Zoran Zaev. In the meanwhile, SDSM returned to the Parliament after Zaev was granted amnesty by Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski. DPA continued to boycott the Parliament until the recognition of Kosovo on 9 October 2008.

The focus is again on the four Hague cases which were returned to the Macedonian courts. By reopening these cases DUI has found itself in the centre of attention with two of its deputies losing their immunity in order to be present at the court hearings on the "Tortured Mavrovo construction workers" case which was assigned to Macedonian courts by the Hague Tribunal. Moreover, DUI deputy Hisen Xhemaili (also president of DUI Youth Forum), who has to report to the Skopje prison to serve his 30-day prison sentence, has been hiding from justice authorities. Although the police has issued the warrant for Xhemaili's arrest, Ahmeti and DUI remain silent. Ahmeti says he has better things to do than to think about the whereabouts of their deputy. President of the opposition party DPA Menduh Thaçi has correctly stated that Ahmeti has not only a political but also a moral problem because he is not able to sanction and hand over his people as was done in the "Tortured Mavrovo construction workers" case, not forgetting the pending "National Liberation Army Leaders" case with Ahmeti being the first on the list. It remains to be seen whether Ahmeti will turn himself over to authorities once his case opens, as he persuaded his colleagues to do.

What about the Democratic Union for Integration? It behaves and has always behaved as a "sleeping beauty". The only reaction it showed to the behaviour of the government and the VMRO-DPMNE parliamentary majority was an article by DUI Vice-President Teuta Arifi in which she illustratively described Gruevski's behaviour as "democratura". In her article in the Skopje daily newspaper Arifi sends a message to Gruevski "that such behaviour has harmed DPA, may harm DUI and will surely

harm the Republic of Macedonia". Having expressed this position DUI fell asleep again and Teuta Arifi has not appeared in public any more to oppose the looser policy of Gruevski's government.

As a result of his coalition with DUI Gruevski has improved his rating among the Macedonian voters. Had he known it would be so easy to rule together with DUI Gruevski would have taken it in coalition already in 2006. Gruevski has learn his lesson, but it is not sure whether DUI will learn its lesson, too. Analysts believe that DPA's absence from the current coalition has prevented the party from being completely marginalised in the political scene, which might soon happen to DUI.

LACK OF POLITICAL CULTURE

At the beginning of September a new Albanian party was born in the Macedonian political scene called "Demokracija e Re" (New Democracy) led by the former president of DPA Imer Selmani. A few former ministers from DPA joined him. The first impression was that they were leaving the party because they lost their minister positions after DPA moved to opposition.

During the first few days DPA appeared to be falling apart, after three deputies and two vice-presidents left it and ten of its district committees partly or fully disintegrated. However, that did not affect significantly DPA and one month later the situation was different. The real disappointment was when DPA, after the people close to Imer Selmani left the party, instead of showing some new, young and capable people who would give a new impetus to the party, elected as vice presidents DPA veteran Iljaz Halimi and Mevlan Tahiri, who had walked - during the 17 years of political pluralism - through all Albanian parties in Macedonia including DPA which he left after the parliamentary elections in 2006 to join Bardhul Mahmuti and his BDSH (Democratic Union of Albanians) for the same reasons as Salmani and his team. At the 2008 elections BDSH failed to win even 1% of votes. Three months later Mevlan Tahiri was elected to the position of vice-president of DPA which thus showed that it has no (or can not see any) new people in the party.

Nevertheless, "New Democracy" is still in the formation phase and the time will show whether is was only meant to assume DPA's position in the government or will it be able to offer real political and economic ideas and the European political culture which the parties in Macedonia (both Macedonian and Albanian) lack.

2009 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

After the incumbent president of Macedonia Branko Crvenkovski stated he would not run for the second term of office, silent speculations on the potential candidates for this position from the leading and the opposition parties have begun. After his term of office expires Crvenkovski will most probably take over the leading position in SDSM.

Some of the possible candidates have been mentioned in the public: Deputy Prime Minister Zoran Stavrevski who was Gruevski's best man at the latter's marriage, former mayor of Skopje Risto Penov from the opposition and former president of the UN General Assembly Srgjan Kerim. Kerim would be probably accepted by both sides and perhaps even by the Albanians who have not revealed any potential candidates for the president yet.

PRIME MINISTER GRUEVSKI HAS NOT RECOGNISED KOSOVO'S INDEPENDENCE?

Macedonia finally recognised Kosovo, which happened to be one day after the adoption of the Serbian resolution by the UN. Macedonia's recognition of Kosovo has been long awaited not only by Kosovo and the Albanians in Macedonia but also by the USA and some other EU member states, and it actually happened very fast.

For the first time Albanian political parties (DUI, DPA and New Democracy) assumed a common position and presented a resolution which the Parliament adopted late in the evening, which was half an hour later followed by the government's decision on the recognition of Kosovo. The decision was justified among other by the explanation that the government accepted the Parliament's recommendation contained in the adopted resolution to recognise the independence of Kosovo. The opposition accused the government that it was hiding behind the Parliament, since pursuant to Macedonian constitution and legislation the government is the one which is supposed to recognise and establish diplomatic relations with other states.

4

According to the information received by the IFIMES International Institute, the government had adopted the decision to recognise Kosovo already during the debate on the resolution but it was waiting for the Parliament to pass the resolution first and only then it officially adopted the decision on the recognition. IFIMES's reliable source states that the item on the agenda of the government meeting which dealt with the decision on the recognition of Kosovo's independence was not chaired by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski but by Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Ivica Bocevski. Allegedly Gruevski did not want to chair the meeting on the excuse that he had other duties. This information shows that Macedonian government did not intend to recognise Kosovo soon, but obviously could not resist the international political pressures, which was to be expected. This proves that Macedonia only functions under pressure and that it has come to the situation where it has to recognise Kosovo due to the international political pressure rather than because Kosovo represents the political reality in the Balkans and because the recognition of Kosovo would be in the interest of Macedonia and stability in the region. After the recognition, DPA ended the boycott and returned to the Parliament.

Analysts believe that by being absent during the decision-making on the recognition of Kosovo Gruevski once more discredited his coalition partner DUI and its leader Ali Ahmeti which illustratively shows DUI's position in the present coalition.

DIFFICULT PERIOD FOR MACEDONIA

The IFIMES International Institute estimates that Macedonia faces a difficult period in the political field, especially regarding the international relations and the economy. Ambassador Matthew Nimitz's latest proposal package for the resolution of Macedonia's name dispute with Greece brings no hope that the row would be soon resolved, especially after Prime Minister Gruevski rejected the proposal. The country's ability to sail into calmer waters depends on its political leaders whose differences on the crucial national and state issues are currently so big that they are damaging national interests of the Republic of Macedonia. The recognition of Kosovo is the first step towards the country's stability. The next step would be the final resolution of the irrational dispute with Greece. Nevertheless, the presidential and local elections set for next year are likely to heat up Macedonia's political scene.

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5



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